

[East Valley Tribune](#)

Bill Richardson

You can learn a lot about a person by the company he keeps, where he keeps it and how long he sticks around.

So often those who are on their way to the stop are only passing through, punching a ticket and going through the motions of wanting to look like the rest of us. It's nice to see when a regular guy gets to a place where he can do what's right and make a difference along the way.

Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., has been a regular at Ray's ASU Barber Shop in Tempe for as long as anyone can remember. For at least as long as when Ray Boles cut his hair at his first shop between 4th and 5th streets on Mill Avenue in the old downtown Tempe. Harry, as everyone in Tempe calls him, has made the move with Ray from there to the Tempe Center and eventually to the shop on Lemon Street just east of Rural Road. When Ray retired, his son Charles began to cut Harry's hair. Harry and I share the same chair at Ray's.

For decades, almost every Tempe mayor had Ray cut his hair. One had his hair styled and another only came around during his campaign and left in a huff when one of the barbers chose to disagree with the view of the world according to him. There's no parliamentary procedure at Ray's.

Every couple of weeks, as sure as clockwork, you'll see Harry sitting in the same chair Ray used for more than 50 years.

Legend has it that the old chair used by the poor kid from Arkansas and who landed in Tempe by accident on New Year's Eve 1945 after serving in the navy during World War II possesses Ray's decades of wisdom, much like a library for those who are willing to sit patiently and get their hair cut and spend some time with the common folk.

I've known Harry for 40 years. Back then it was Mr. Mitchell and when he called my name it could be heard throughout the halls of Tempe High School. He'd yell and sometimes I'd listen. Harry was one of the best teachers I ever had. He gave me one of the few "A's" I ever got. The passion he had in the classroom when he spoke about government was exciting and inspiring. I see the same passion when we talk at Ray's. He talks, I listen, I talk, and he listens. And so does everyone else at the barbershop.

Some had their worries before Harry shellacked Republican incumbent J.D. Hayworth, a know-it-all who used his intelligence as a weapon to achieve power and not as a tool of positive change.

But Harry rose to the occasion, exhibiting the same passion he had 40 years ago in the

classroom.

Being a brand new congressman is a big deal in your hometown, while being a new congressman in Washington, D.C., is lot like being lost in a foreign country. They say for a new guy to get anything done is nearly impossible. That's not Harry's story.

After less than six months in Washington, Harry is [leading the charge](#) for the C.O.P.S. Improvement Act of 2007, a program that will put 555 new police officers on the street in the East Valley and provide needed money to upgrade local law enforcement technology. No doubt one of the things Harry has heard down at Ray's is about his [hometown having the highest crime rate](#) in the county.

Besides leading the charge for more bodies and money, [Harry spent Monday at the Mesa Police Department headquarters](#) with Mesa Chief George Gascon, who is recognized internationally as an innovative leader with a solid track record of success in attacking and reducing crime. Maybe they met at the barbershop? I'm told George was talking and Harry was listening, and vice versa, just like Harry does at Ray's every couple of weeks.

Since Harry gave me an "A" 40 years ago, I'm going to have to give him one back. At the end of his first semester in government class, the new kid in Congress has shown all hope is not lost and he can get things done that make the world a better place.

No doubt sitting in Ray's chair for more than 50 years had something to do with it.

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